

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 20, 2007

Agenda Item: Tentative Wolf Season Structure

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed:

X **Approval of Tentative Rule**

 Approval of Final Rule/Action

 Endorse Course of Action

 None - information only

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 60 minutes

Background

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to delist gray wolves from the Endangered Species Act in early 2008. Regulated public harvest was first endorsed as a management tool by the Governor's Wolf Advisory Council in 2000 and eventually included in Montana's management plan. The 2001 Legislature passed SB 163, reclassifying the wolf as a nongame species in need of management automatically upon federal delisting. The 2007 Legislature created a wolf license (SB 372). Other statutes within MCA enable the FWP Commission to adopt rules and regulations pertaining to the taking of wolves by hunting and trapping as a species in need of management. This tentative rule would create the basic season structure for public harvest (e.g. management units, season dates, and other general regulations) for implementation upon successful delisting. Actual harvest levels would be determined through the adoption of specific quotas or permits (i.e. the number allowed to be taken and where) by the FWP Commission at a later date and as appropriate relative to the population status and other factors. FWP intends to proceed cautiously and conservatively and would not jeopardize wolf recovery.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The state's wolf plan is based on the recommendations of the Wolf Advisory Council. From 2001-03, FWP received thousands of public comments while preparing an environmental impact statement on the conservation and management plan. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved Montana's regulatory mechanisms (state laws and plan) in 2004. Public comments were solicited at all seven FWP regional Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings during August and September 2007. CAC members supported wolf hunting and trapping.

Alternatives and Analysis

Alternatives include do not adopt a tentative wolf season structure at this time. However, adoption of a tentative season structure now enables FWP to solicit public comment on a detailed hunting/trapping proposal as suggested by the state's wolf plan. It would facilitate timely adoption of a final wolf season structure and appropriate quota or permit levels (decided at a later time) for implementation upon successful delisting.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Under the biennial season-setting process, this proposal is presented to the Commission for the 2008-09 and 2009-10 seasons in anticipation of successful delisting sometime during this two-year period. The season structure is designed similar to other game animals. When combined with a subsequent quota / permit system, public harvest is expected to more proactively manage numbers and help address livestock depredations.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission adopt the tentative wolf season structure as proposed by the Department.